

American Embassy Newsletter for American Citizens - Issue 4

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1. Introduction

Last year in July and August we received calls and e-mails from many Americans concerned about a new limit on the amount they could withdraw from their U.S. bank accounts via automatic teller machines (ATMs) in Argentina. We were informed that indeed the limit had been reduced to about USD \$100, but cardholders could make multiple successive withdrawals up to their banks' withdrawal limits. This April, another flood of inquiries came in when more cardholders encountered newly imposed withdrawal restrictions. Based on your inquiries, we began researching the reason for the change. You can read what we found out in Section 9 of this newsletter.

We also received a few calls and e-mails from Americans who received frightening phone calls from people claiming their family members had been kidnapped or involved in accidents. Our Regional Security Office offers recommendations on how to respond to these so-called "virtual kidnapping" calls in Section 3.

As you can see, some of our most interesting topics spring from your inquiries. Please keep those comments, questions and suggestions coming. We love to hear from you.

Susan K. Abeyta

Consul General

2. Postage Rate Increase

Starting May 12th, the price of sending a one-ounce first-class letter increased to 42 cents.

The good news is that consumers can buy "Forever Stamps" at 42 cents now that can be used "forever." These special stamps that bear no denomination were developed by the postal service to help consumers ease the transition during price changes.

Selected Prices and Services New

(effective May 12)

First-Class Mail Letter (1 oz) 42 cents

First-Class Mail Letter (2oz.) 59 cents

Postcards 27 cents

Large Envelope (2oz.) \$1.00

Money Orders (up to \$500) \$1.05

Certified Mail \$2.70

First-Class Mail International Letter 72 cents

(1 oz. to Canada or Mexico)

First-Class Mail International Letter 94 cents

(1 oz. to other countries)

Consistent with a new law, prices for mailing services will be adjusted annually in May. The Postal Service plans to provide 90-days notice of all price changes. More information on the price increases and all postal products and services can be found at <http://usps.com/prices>.

3. From the Regional Security Office: Virtual Kidnappings -- What to do

"Ghost Kidnappings," sometimes referred to as "virtual kidnappings," are scams in which someone claims to have kidnapped a family member who is out of the house or temporarily out of contact with the victim. The con artist

demands expeditious payment so that the unsuspecting victim does not have time to confirm the family member's whereabouts.

A new scheme involves a caller who states that the victim's family member is involved in a catastrophic event and requires immediate attention. For example, the caller may report a child has been severely injured in a car accident and requires medical care. The con artist will use this tactic to instill shock and surprise in an effort to elicit personal information on the victim and his family. Once enough personal information is obtained, the con artist will change his demeanor and begin to threaten the victim. The caller claims to know everything about the victim ("we know where you live") and attempts to extort money in return for not harming or kidnapping the family member.

Con artists make dozens if not hundreds of these calls every day. Either the victim falls for the scam and agrees to pay or hangs up and refuses to pay. If the scam fails, the con artist usually moves on to the next potential victim.

Recommended Actions

- Brief your family members and domestic employees on these scams.
- Always know where your family members are or at least have a way to contact them in an emergency.
- If you receive a threatening call, try to remain calm. Remember, the vast majority of these calls are hoaxes. Whether done as a prank or an attempt to extort valuables from you, the con artists are attempting to exploit your fears.
- If you have caller ID, write down the number.
- Do not tell the caller where you live or agree to any money transfer.
- Never volunteer information.
- Ask to speak to your family member to confirm his/her identity.
- If the caller refuses to let you speak with your family member and stays on the line (many will hang up at the first sign of stubbornness) ask the caller to confirm a question that is known only to your family. You can work out a secret word or phrase (e.g. favorite toy, pet name, first grade teacher's name, etc.) to test for identifying a family member.

- Keep the caller on the line as long as possible and have another family member or friend contact the alleged victim.
- Listen and take notes of the demands, tone or accent of the caller, background noise, and any other important information.
- Ask for a way to make contact with the caller. If they refuse to answer, ask when they will call again.

4. Passport Fee Increase and New Requirements for Minors

The U.S. Government raised passport fees on February 1. For most adult applicants renewing a passport, the fee increased to USD \$75. The fee for children under age 16 rose to USD \$85. Some applicants, such as citizens whose passports have been lost or stolen, will pay \$100.

Also effective February 1, both parents must sign passport applications for children up to age 16, the age when they may sign their own applications (the age cut-off had been 14). Although minors aged 16 and 17 may sign their own passport applications, they must be accompanied by a parent if they lack proper identification.

Please refer to the Embassy website at <http://argentina.usembassy.gov>.

For details on all new requirements, including links to new downloadable passport forms also introduced on February 1. Forms issued prior to February 1, cannot be accepted.

Passport, birth certificate and notary services are offered by appointment only. Please make your appointment on-line through the Embassy website.

5. Elections 2008: Voting From Argentina

U.S. Election Day is fast approaching as we're reminded daily by U.S. and Argentine media reports. Voter turnout is traditionally higher during presidential election years, but this year participation in primaries has been especially high so the general election may well set a record. Your vote is important! If you want to vote in Argentina, you may request an absentee ballot from your voting state.

The official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance is the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at <http://www.fvap.gov/>. It contains a wealth of information about absentee voting, including the downloadable absentee ballot application (Federal Postcard Application),

state-specific instructions for completing the form and links to state and local officials. You may also contact American Citizen Services in person or by e-mail at BuenosAires-ACS@state.gov for voting assistance.

American Citizen Services will host a Voting Day on October 8. On this red, white and blue-letter day, American citizens will be able to ceremoniously drop their ballots into a box in the Consulate for ACS to send to the United States in time for counting on the actual November 4 Election Day. We'll provide all the details in our next newsletter.

6. On-Line Registration with the Embassy: Help Us Help You

Americans living or traveling in Argentina are encouraged to register with the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires through the State Department website travel.state.gov. You may also access the on-registration program via the Embassy website <http://argentina.usembassy.gov>.

Registration at the U.S. Embassy makes your presence and whereabouts known, in case it is necessary for a consular officer to contact you in an emergency. During a disaster overseas, American consular officers can assist in evacuation were that to become necessary. But they cannot assist you if they do not know where you are.

7. Tax Obligations for Green Card Holders

If you have a green card, you are a legal permanent resident (LPR) of the United States, and even if you live abroad, you will be considered a U.S. resident for all tax-related matters. This means that you will have to file a sworn affidavit of taxes unless:

- (a) There's a judicial or administrative record showing that you have renounced your LPR status or that it has been revoked;
- (b) Your yearly income is lower than the amounts established by IRS;
- (c) Your LPR status is affected by a tax-related treaty between your native country and the United States.

8. ACS on the Road

American Citizen Services periodically provides consular services to American citizens outside of Buenos Aires. In February, Vice Consul Christopher Anderson and Special Consular Services Assistant Gaston Marano visited

Mendoza for three days. They visited two prisoners and checked on the welfare of two American citizen children. They also provided passport services, fielded questions in an "Ask the Consul" Q&A session and spoke to a local newspaper about visa issues.

In March, Consul Kathleen Corey and Passport and Citizenship Assistant Susana Glucksmann visited Rosario to offer passport and voting registration services. Corey and Passport and Citizenship Assistant Alexandra Castellanos provided the same services March 27 at the Lincoln school in the Buenos Aires suburb of La Lucila.

9. Update on ATM Withdrawal Limits

Last July, Visa debit- and credit-card holders got a surprise when ATM machines restricted withdrawal limits to about USD \$100. MasterCard cardholders got the same surprise in late March. ACS has contacted card companies, banks and Argentine government officials to determine the cause of the restriction. So far, no clear reason for the change has emerged and no party is willing to take credit for this inconvenience to clients.

The good news, however, is that in response to receiving hundreds of complaints both Visa and MasterCard have doubled their withdrawal limits to USD \$200. Both companies also explain that cardholders are free to make multiple successive withdrawals at the same machine up to their bank's daily withdrawal limit. ACS continues to research the issue to determine the exact cause for the restriction on international ATM withdrawals and learn how much international cardholders pay in ATM fees as the teller machines do not normally provide this information.

10. Appointment or No Appointment: That is the Question

The American Citizen Services Office is open to the public from Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to noon and 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. ACS provides some services by appointment only and others on a walk-in basis.

Services Provided by Appointment Only

Issuing of US Documents

Regular Passports

Emergency Passports (no appt. required for same-day travel)

Consular Reports of Birth Abroad

Notarization of Documents

Notarizations of private documents for use in the US

Morning and afternoon appointments can be made in the "US Citizens" section of our website.

<http://argentina.usembassy.gov/service.html>.

Services Provided on a Walk-In Basis (8:30 a.m. to noon)

Issuing of US Documents

Passport Extra Pages

General Information on obtaining US Documents and Legalizations

Vital Records

US Good Conduct Certificates

Apostilles

Voting Information

Please take a number upon entering the Consular Waiting Room.

If you have any questions or comments please write us an e-mail:

BuenosAires-ACS@state.gov.

11. Upcoming Embassy Holidays and Fourth of July

The Embassy will be closed on May 26 and June 16 in observance of U.S. Memorial Day and Argentine Flag Day, respectively.

July 4 and July 9, the Embassy will be closed for U.S. and Argentine Independence Days. ACS will offer emergency services only on June 4, July 16 and August 6.

If you were wondering why you didn't hear of the American Fourth of July Fair, normally held in April, wonder no longer. Organizing groups elected not to stage the event in April this year, although a patriotic party may be in the works for early 2009. Watch future issues of this newsletter for details.

12. Useful Websites

Nonimmigrant visa inquiries: bns-visas@state.gov

Immigrant visa inquiries: buenosaires-iv@state.gov

American Citizen Services inquiries: buenosaires-acs@state.gov

Social Security at the Embassy: buenosairesfbu@state.gov

U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance

<http://www.fvap.gov>

Travel advisories

<http://travel.state.gov/>

Internal Revenue Service (for tax forms and information)

<http://www.irs.gov>

Department of Motor Vehicles (for driver's license renewal information)

<http://www.dmv.org/>

Argentina Immigration

www.mininterior.gov.ar/migraciones

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